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SUBJECT: Soviets Postpone Fahmi Visit to Moscow

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The USSR has suddenly postponed the visit to Moscow on ^{July} 15 ~~June~~ of Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmi. Fahmi said in Cairo today that Soviet party boss Brezhnev, in an "urgent message," said that the visit should be put off until October because "circumstances" prevented adequate preparations. ~~for the visit.~~

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The postponement is particularly surprising since it comes against a background of somewhat warmer Egyptian-Soviet relations.

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It is possible that some as yet undisclosed problem arose between the ~~three~~^{two} countries in the past few days that prompted the cancellation. The Egyptian announcement regarding Fahmi's last minute preparations suggests, however, that there was no last minute hitches.

It seems more likely that the initiative lies with Moscow. The cancellation may have been caused either by the Soviets unwillingness to make hard decisions regarding resuming military aid to Cairo and the venue of a Brezhnev-Sadat meeting or by a very recent switch in Moscow's tactics toward the Egyptians. It is possible that Moscow has now decided to play ~~together~~^{tougher} with Cairo, possibly in the expectation that this will weaken Sadat domestically when it becomes clear that Egyptian military forces have no viable supply alternative to the Soviet Union. If this was indeed the genesis of the last-minute cancellation, it has the earmarks of a not very adroit or well-thought out policy.

There is also a possibility that the Fahmi cancellation stems from reasons broader than the present or future state of Egyptian-Soviet relations. The Soviets on July 2 cancelled--only five days before he was to be in Moscow--a visit

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My Pakistani Prime Minister Bhutto. A mid-July visit by Indonesian Foreign Minister Malik was also cancelled. Their last-minute cancellations may be only coincidental, but they do involve the same time frame--mid-July--and in all three cases the Soviets have cited the press of other business as necessitating the postponements.

A central committee plenum apparently has been scheduled for July 23-24 and if it were to be more than a routine affair, the Soviets might not want to be saddled with important foreign visitors. At the same time, however, the French Foreign Minister is due in Moscow tomorrow and Brezhnev is going to Poland for a ceremonial visit just before the plenum.

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